



County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

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Director

July 8, 2008

To: Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke, Chair
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: Patricia S. Ploehn, LCSW
Director

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**MARCH 13, 2007 BOARD AGENDA ITEM #15 – EDUCATION CONSULTANT REFERRALS
AND BI-ANNUAL REPORT ON SCHOOL DISTRICTS' PERFORMANCE IN PROVIDING
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR FOSTER CHILDREN**

On March 13, 2007, your Board instructed the Director of Children and Family Services to prepare a report bi-annually with substantive, measurable data on the performance of school districts in providing educational services for foster children/youth and report on various critical educational components addressed by the Education Consultants.

The services of the Education Consultants continue to be well-received by the Children's Social Workers (CSWs), the caregivers, and the school districts since their official arrival into the regional offices on April 1, 2007. Ten contracts for Education Consultant Services were renewed for Fiscal Year 2007-2008 providing 20 to 40 hours of coverage each week to thirteen (13) of the Department's eighteen (18) regional offices. The offices being serviced are Lancaster, Palmdale, Glendora, Pasadena, El Monte, Metro North, West Los Angeles, Hawthorne, Wateridge, Belvedere, Corporate, Santa Fe Springs, and Lakewood.

Efforts are currently underway to contract for an additional four Education Consultants with an anticipated start date of August 1, 2008. These Consultants will serve the East San Fernando Valley, Santa Clarita/West San Fernando Valley, Compton, Pomona and Covina Annex offices.

The Consultants provide focused and knowledgeable advocacy in serving the educational needs of our youth. They provide a voice for the youth to ensure their educational rights are addressed and received in a comprehensive and timely manner. As credentialed teachers, the Consultants are experts in the education code and the language used by the schools as well as navigating within the vast and varied 81 school districts within Los Angeles County. They are able to effectively and efficiently address the services requested by CSWs to get a child's education back on track.

"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"

To begin the process, the Referral for Education Consultant Services form is completed by the CSW or the caregiver and submitted to the Consultant. The issues addressed on the referral form range from suspension and expulsion, which always take first priority with the Consultants, to special education assessments, Individual Education Plans (IEP) and Student Study or Success Team (SST), to academic and behavioral problems, and various AB 490 concerns. Effective January 1, 2004, AB 490 imposed new duties and rights related to the education and care of dependents in foster care, including ensuring school stability and protection for grades and credits. Work regarding the IEPs ranges from drafting a written request to the school for a special education assessment, to advocating for the necessary accommodations. The Consultants will then attend the IEP meetings to ensure all of the children's educational needs, accommodations and directives are addressed and written into the IEPs to obligate the school districts in providing the necessary services. The Consultants do a follow-up contact to ensure the school remains in compliance with each IEP.

Youth Benefiting from the Services Provided by the Education Consultants

A total of 1,577 educational challenges faced by our children have been resolved by the Consultants during the first nine months of the Fiscal Year 2007-2008 (Attachment A). This total represents all of the multiple challenges faced by each referred child.

Since July 1, 2007, 24.9% or 392 children were not attending school but have since been enrolled as a result of the actions taken by a Consultant. In the past, this unacceptable situation of a child not attending school while under the jurisdiction of the Department may have gone unresolved. The reasons for this range is as follows: the child being fearful of attending local schools because of gang ties or activities; efforts not being made to enroll a child after being expelled; special education youth moving from one school to another with the new school not recognizing the child's special needs; discouraged teenagers dropping out because they are short of credits for high school graduation; schools not complying with AB 490 by refusing to enroll youth immediately due to outstanding fees and fines; not having school or immunization records; and uniforms not being available.

Concerted, hard fought efforts by the Consultants resolved many of these hurdles. Among the strategies and interventions employed by the Consultants included: seeking and obtaining permission from an outside school district to enroll the fearful foster youth into a safer school setting, re-enrolling the expelled child/youth with a behavior contract in hand, and advocating for the special education child's needs by insisting the school district follow education code and accommodate the child's educational needs. The Consultants also redirected discouraged teenagers into adult education to complete their high school diplomas in order to move into vocational training, and informed the school about the rights bestowed upon foster youth by AB 490 regarding immediate enrollment.

Another 23.2% or 366 children received IEP advocacy assistance from the Consultants. This is critical work by the Consultants considering about one-third of the youth we serve are classified as special education students. Having a Consultant participate in a child's IEP meeting provides a knowledgeable professional advocating for the child's educational needs and entitlements. With the Consultants in attendance with the CSW and/or caregiver, it is

more likely the child's actual individual educational needs will be met, rather than the provision of the school's "cookie cutter" accommodations or resources that are readily available. This added advocacy increases the child's opportunity for success.

In situations where a child in special education has been suspended or expelled from school, the Consultants' interventions have been especially important. In the resulting hearings, the Consultants have often been successful in arguing that the disciplinary action was inappropriate and illegal due to the school district's non-compliance with the child's current IEP. This advocacy has reversed the disciplinary action which allows the child back into the school and expunges the adverse mark in the school record. Further, it brings to the forefront that the school district is in non-compliance and strongly encourages the enforcement of the directives in the child's IEP. This likely would never have happened without the knowledge base and service skills of the Consultants.

It is not surprising that 22.5% or 355 of our children who are referred struggle with problems. The Consultants employ the following hands-on interventions to assist each child in improving their academic achievement: developing relationships and learning strategies with the school, caregiver and student; small group instruction; homework modification; moving the child's desk closer to the teacher; establishing positive incentives; creating structured routines; requesting student study/success teams; developing behavior contracts; requesting special education assessments; arranging professional and/or peer tutoring; and, addressing and monitoring poor attendance in class/school.

Data Outcomes

Attachment A summarizes the data which has been collected and tabulated for the first nine months of the fiscal year, commencing July 1, 2007 through March 31, 2008 to determine the performance outcomes of the services provided by the Consultants. There are eighteen specific service areas with a nineteenth choice for "other." Multiple service areas can be selected for each referral; therefore, when tabulating, 100% may be exceeded. These referrals are not counted until each service area has been resolved. Once a resolution has been reached for all the selected service areas, the referral is considered completed. A total of 1577 service areas have been completed. As mentioned earlier, 24.9% or 392 children involved enrollment issues, 23.2% or 366 children involved IEP issues, 22.5% or 355 children addressed academic challenges (poor grades). The next four highest requested areas of service were: Special Education issues with 14.3% or 226 children, Team Decision Making (TDM) with 13.1% or 206 children, behavioral concerns at 12.7% or 201 children, and records with 11.7% or 184 children. The increasing numbers of TDM requests is an indicator of CSWs' awareness of addressing the child's educational needs when discussing placements issues.

Communication and Building Bridges

All of these matters require direct communication with the involved school site and perhaps the district office. Therefore, it is very important for the Department to keep the lines of communication open with each district we work with to develop and strengthen relationships to

reach a shared understanding on the importance of improving the educational outcomes for the children served by both agencies.

The Consultants work closely with schools when advocating for the needs of our youth. Many individuals at school sites are unfamiliar with AB 490 and the rights it bestows on foster youth. The use of consultants allows for a training opportunity to educate the school about the new law while resolving the enrollment or school stability issue. By taking this approach we improve the service to our youth. The same applies with the school district's knowledge and compliance with special education law and the due process requirements in discipline. The advocacy role of the Consultant is done in a collaborative, rather than adversarial, manner with the Consultants reporting that the majority of their interactions with various schools and school district personnel have lead to the development of stronger working relationships through improved communication.

Classification Study and Contract Continuation

Progress continues in the feasibility study to establish a new permanent position for these services. The hope is to expand the valuable services by creating County Education Personnel Items to replace the contracts for the Education Consultant Services.

In summary, the Department is very pleased by the large number of youth being served by the current number of Education Consultants under contract. We are proud of the program's success and accomplishments. With the Board's continued support, we look forward to the continual improvement of the educational outcomes of the children we serve.

If you have questions, please call me or your staff may contact Armand Montiel, Board Liaison at (213) 351-5530.

PSP:AC:HK

JH:pa

Attachment

c: Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
Chief Executive Officer
Deputy Chief Executive Officer for Children and Families Well-Being Cluster
County Counsel

DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILY SERVICES

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